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## THE PHOTOGRAPHIC WORKER.

**The Photographic Assistant.**—In the following pages I shall review the present condition of the photographic assistant, and endeavour to show how this condition may be improved, and the daily life of the assistant made as agreeable as the state of the photographic trade will allow. It would, of course, be unreasonable to expect the photographic assistant to command a position in advance of his industry; but I shall have reason to show that the opposite is nearer the fact, and that the position of the photographic worker falls considerably below what it might be when compared with the workers in other skilled handicrafts. The wages paid to a skilled photographer are much below those of kindred trades wanting less skill in practice, and shorter training to acquire. My main object, therefore, will be to indicate by what means the photographic worker may secure an adequate wage for the services he renders, and, in addition, I shall point out how the conditions under which he works may be made as healthy and equitable as possible.

The present system of commercialism in which we live is a condition of severe competition, and incessant struggling for a livelihood from which none can escape. Until recently, however, Photography has largely escaped from this general state of conflict, owing chiefly to its late origin, and comparatively slow development on the commercial side; its progress being scientific rather than commercial. This is now at an end, for the methods and practices of modern commercialism are becoming general in the trade, and Photography is taking its place amongst the ordinary industries of the country. The trade has grown largely within this last ten years, and is rapidly adding to itself all the good and bad features of modern commercial methods. This is shown in the complaints of employers that custom is harder to obtain, profits are smaller, that competition becomes keener every day, and that it is a struggle now-a-days to make Photography pay. We also see the old-fashioned steady-going employer soon left behind in this fierce rush of present-day methods of business. The change in business methods is not without its effects upon the assistants, and they in turn have to submit to reduced wages, harder conditions, and a want of consideration in their treatment by employers. Kindness, in dealing with assistants was one of the best features of older industrial systems. Modern



commercialism admits of but little affection between employer and employed ; but, on the contrary, the workman is compelled to take means of protecting himself against the aggression and sharp practices of his employer.

The strife between master and man follows from the ordinary laws of commercialism, resulting from the progress of Photography, and its consequent growth into one of the industries of the country. It also shows the advance from a simple unorganised cottage industry towards that complete and highly-organised method of industry, which is manifested in the factory system. The factory system has already made its appearance in some branches of Photography ; for instance, in view work, enlarging, cheap portraiture, re-touching, plate making, every branch is becoming more or less specialised. A man no longer works through all branches, but confines his attention to a single part or one process. This specialisation leads directly to the factory system ; immense buildings spring up, and large numbers of men are employed under one employer, all engaged in doing a particular kind of work. The specialist thus becomes an important factor in this system, and it need scarcely be pointed out that such a worker becomes more helpless. He is but a single atom in a vast machine which controls him, and yet over which he has no control whatever. The individual is helpless amongst the powerful influences which surround him. The specialist of necessity suffers more than the all-round man, and thus isolated, has no power either of holding his own or of standing up for his own just rights and reasonable demands. The want of power a worker possesses over his own daily life is the most marked feature of our present system of commercialism, and the greatest evil against which the isolated individual has to fight. In all trades we see this clearly recognised ; the workers are combining and taking mutual action to protect themselves against evils they cannot meet when standing alone, to gain through combination, a recognition of their just demands, and to secure their means of livelihood. The photographic worker will be compelled to do the same by force of circumstances if he is to obtain any recognition of his just claims. It is quite useless for an individual to agitate for the redress of grievances, because the employers immediately combine against him, refusing to give him employment ; and he is thus silenced and made to suffer for his courageous actions.

The most diverse workers are learning the value of combination, such as the dock labourers, shop assistants, theatrical employées ; and proving that no body of workers is debarred from organising because of poverty, the opposition of employers, or the nature of the occupation. When so many trades are organised it is obvious that those who stand outside the general labour movement are doubly the losers. They lose the advantages of combination amongst themselves, and the support and encouragement of other organised bodies of workers. The photographic workers should



therefore strive to fall into line with other organised bodies to gain their help in times of need, and to aid one another. Much can be done by organisation, in the words of a worker in a kindred trade to photography: "No matter what nature of work you may be doing, or in what profession you may be, you can only get your proper recognition by combination."

Above all others the photographic worker wants some form of combination to protect him in consequence of the nature of his business. Photographers are widely distributed and work in isolated places; they become the easy prey of some unscrupulous employer, who knows full well that they have no protecting society at their backs. Although much larger in number than the members of other occupations which are well organised, this wide distribution increases the difficulty in forming a strong combination. It can, however, be overcome as I shall show below.

The rise of the specialist creates a demand for some system of protection, he being the most dependant of all workers, and as, I believe, daily increasing in photography. Hence the value of association cannot be too strongly insisted upon at the present time, for it is the only method by which the photographic assistants can raise themselves from a condition of low wages and miserable surroundings to one of some prosperity and comfort. But beyond this it must not be forgotten that the social and educational advantages of combination are even greater than the commercial. The photographer by these means can provide against times of sickness, want of employment, accidents, and meet unusual distress without heavy loss or the risk of starvation. By weekly meetings he can discuss all matters relating to his daily life and occupation, and by exchanging ideas with fellow-photographers improve his own mind and help on the education of others.

Having admitted the value of organisation as a means of securing the legitimate demands of the workers, it remains to accurately specify what the photographic assistant suffers under, and what are the alterations he desires. Once clearly stated, and an organisation could be formed on definite principles to meet and redress these grievances and strive to attain the desired improvements. In general it may be shown that the assistants' chief complaint is against low wages and unfair competition. These two, however, are closely related, the one depending on the other and varying accordingly. I will first consider unfair competition.

**Unfair Competition.**—By this I mean the competition amongst the workers themselves, that is to say the over-stocked condition of the photographic labour market. An over-stocking not by the skilled workers, but by the incompetent and inferior. The trade is over-crowded by the badly trained and indifferent, and in consequence the skilled man is forced to accept a low rate of wages, and to lower the quality of his work to the level of the inferior,



badly paid workman. This result is an evil to all concerned, to employer as well as employed, for no employer can keep up the quality of his work, and likewise his prices, if he depend on cheap and inferior workers. It cannot be expected that a workman will strive to do his best when he knows that his wages are regulated not by the skill he displays, but by the price at which an inferior workman is valued. In this way the trade gradually passes into the hands of the less skilled, the really skilled man becomes demoralised, and either leaves the business or reduces the quality of his work to that of the poorly paid worker. This over-crowding is, therefore, the root grievance from which others grow, and it will be well to examine at length the causes from which it arises.

**The Specialist.**—The commercial progress of photography having produced the specialist, it follows that the trade has been opened up to a much larger body of men than formerly. A training in one branch can be acquired in a short time, and calls for less natural ability to become a proficient. Any number of men can soon be taught a single process, and are then ready to compete in the labour market. There is thus an unlimited supply, and always an excess of those wanting employment over those offering. This surplus, however, would not in itself cause much reduction in wages if the specialist confined his operations to his own branch; but he does not, for directly trade is bad, or he is thrown out of employment in his own branch, the specialist is apt to offer his services at a lower rate in any branch of which he has but a smattering, and is by no means a competent hand. Hence the really skilled man in every branch must contend against all this unskilled labour from other branches, and naturally he suffers from the competition.

**The Amateur.**—After the specialist comes the self-taught man, and he abounds in photography, doing great injury to the professional worker. Photography in common with all the professions, is much open to this abuse. Men do not throw themselves into amateur bricklaying or carpentry with the fierce enthusiasm with which they enter on amateur photography, and it is just this enthusiasm and a certain fascination which make the difficulty. The amateur photographer will persevere until he attains some measure of success, and he then either seeks to enter the profession, or he sells his productions at a price somewhere near the bare cost of materials. All the attractive professions suffer from the presence of the amateur, he abounds in art, literature, in the dramatic world, and his appearance in photography seems to establish its right to be classed as a profession rather than a trade.

**Polytechnic Photographers.**—The amateur is aided very much in his endeavours by the growth of the practice of



teaching photography in schools and polytechnics. Such class teaching is entirely pernicious, against the real interests of photography, and a source of evil to the photographic workers. Photography is, undoubtedly, an occupation demanding a high degree of skill from its followers, and skill of a kind that can only be acquired by constant practice in the workshop. Skill cannot be taught by lectures, but must be patiently attained, and in no case can knowledge of a trade take the place of practical work. On this account it is no uncommon experience to find that the man having a vast knowledge of a trade is in no way an adept in producing the best work, and, in fact, is often surpassed by the man whom he despises for a lack of knowledge and a rule-of-thumb system of working.

The present system of polytechnic teaching is in every way productive of men of knowledge and not men of skill. Many certainly give what is called practical instruction; but this, at its best, is a very poor substitute for the every day practice of the printing-room or studio. One teacher has to superintend several students, the instruction is not continuous, and can only give a most superficial training in the trade. Yet, when we see in numerous cases that this slight instruction is thought to be equivalent to three or four years in the printing-room or studio, the absurdity of the whole idea is fully apparent. There are to-day hundreds who are seeking employment as qualified assistants on this slender knowledge, doing no good to themselves, and injuring the prospects of others. In this work I consider the polytechnics have gone beyond their true functions, and have reaped a well-merited failure. The increased facilities for obtaining an insight into photography has induced many to enter the already overcrowded ranks. These intruders have not a tittle of claim as expert workers; they have had no workshop training, but have acquired their knowledge from lectures, books, and their own unintelligent experiments.

**The Apprentice.**—Closely related to polytechnic teaching is the question of apprenticeship. The apprentice system is much abused in photography and greatly adds to that over-stocking of which we complain. The premium seems to be all that some employers require, and having received it, the apprentice is left to learn his craft by any or no method at all. Others seem to have apprentices in order to obtain cheap labour, with no serious intention of giving instruction in the art and practice of photography. The columns of the photographic journals contain almost weekly the complaints of those who have paid big premiums and have had no adequate instruction in return. The following is a typical case of the treatment received:—

“I am an apprentice, having given twenty pounds fee. The first year was chiefly spent in going with messages, the second year assisting at enamelling. Now, in my third year, I am in the studio.



The master wants me to go back to the enamelling, as the enameller has left. I have refused. Can he compel me, it being my last year? Personally he is not a photographer, and, only for the kindness of the operator, I would be a duffer."

The above puts the question very clearly, and could be matched in many other instances. As a rule the friendly operator is not at hand to help the apprentice, and at the end of his term he can only be fitly described as a "duffer." In nearly all cases the indentures are worded to lead the friends to suppose that the lad is to learn every branch of the art, yet most of the term is occupied in running with messages, or doing other menial tasks which have not the remotest connection with photography. In general, the indentures are too vaguely worded, and such terms as "the whole trade," "every branch of the art," are open to any interpretation. Indentures should be most carefully worded; and parents should see that what is to be taught is clearly defined and strictly adhered to in the end. Enamelling and like minor processes cannot in any sense be called photography. It would be far better to keep to a single branch rather than try to teach the whole round of photographic processes. An apprentice would then spend his term in the printing, operating, re-touching, or other branch.

More attention must be given to the training of apprentices if matters are to improve, and it is in this work that the polytechnic teaching finds its legitimate sphere. So long as it imparts instruction to genuine workers, who are actually engaged in the trade, it is of immense advantage; a knowledge of the theory and technique of photography gives the apprentice an added interest in his work and increases his intelligence; but it can never supply that skill upon which his wage and position in life will finally depend. Employers must also take much more interest in their apprentices, regarding them as something better than a cheap and convenient kind of errand boy. Both employer and employed are benefited by maintaining the skill of photographic workers, and it is best achieved by a sound and thorough system of apprenticeship. A badly managed system of apprenticeship opens the door to all those impostors who, for the sake of the premiums, will turn into the labour market badly trained apprentices little better than amateurs.

**The Lady Assistant.**—The women engaged in photography are now a very important body, and increase considerably those difficulties which come from an over-stocked labour market. Whatever industry women invade they are always willing to work in it for a low wage, and so bring down the wages of men to that level. This is no doubt due to the comparatively small number of occupations open to them, and the consequent large number of candidates. As more trades are open to women this evil will grow less. Another cause of this harmful competition is the existence of a large class of women who can obtain partial support from parents,



and having good homes are glad to accept a situation which offers them occupation and a small sum for pin-money. It is this class of women that does considerable injury to those who are forced to follow a trade for a living, and have no other means of support, bringing down wages all round. Photography being a clean and attractive business will always suffer from their presence.

**Old Photographers.**—These form the saddest element in the overstocked photographic labour market. It has always been a puzzle to me to account for the disappearance of the old photographer; I am sure that a true record of their end would discover one of the most painful chapters in the history of struggles against poverty and want of employment. Unfortunately photography is a trade in which men soon become old; in many trades we find men of sixty or seventy still at work, and experiencing little difficulty in obtaining employment; but a photographer is considered too old for work when still in the prime of life, at forty or fifty. Why this should be so, I cannot say, but there are hundreds of such men who having spent the best years of their lives in the trade, yet at that age, are offered a salary of 15s. or even less per week, when they apply for a situation. Many employers consider a printer above thirty too old, and will not offer him work. This rejection of the middle aged man is nothing but prejudice on the part of employers, for, by refusing him, they reject the man most likely to do good work, and who gives strength and stability to whatever business he may belong. An experienced man can be depended upon, and if not quite so quick as a younger man, he is more thorough and surer. Some well-known photographers are constantly changing their assistants, and the reason of this is, no doubt, because they invariably engage young men, who change their situations much oftener than the old or middle aged.

The foregoing being the main causes of over stocking it will be readily seen what a great effect they must have in bringing down the general rate of wages. The competent worker cannot assert his claims against this large number of badly-trained and utterly worthless workers, mainly because employers are persuaded to engage them, thinking of the low wages accepted. The cheapness is only apparent and not real; in the end the price paid is excessive, as many employers find to their cost when too late.

The direct result on the whole of the photographic workers is to bring down their wages to a low level, because the employers make the wages. The inefficient will accept the standard by which they pay the efficient. They will reply to a request for a reasonable wage in this fashion:—"We can get plenty of men to do our work at £1 per week. Why should we pay you 30/-? We will give you 25/." They altogether lose sight of the quality of work the low-paid man will turn out, but he serves the purpose of reducing the wage of a man who really can do good work.



**Competition amongst Employers.**—Besides the unfair competition amongst workers, the competition amongst employers also brings down the rate of wages. The employers are as unorganised as the assistants, and, in consequence, they are driven to adopt a policy of cutting prices; this of necessity results in a reduction of profits. Directly profits fall the employer will try to recoup himself by lowering wages, and if the employ  es are unorganised they have no power to resist this reduction, and are forced to submit. The average employer firmly believes that the money taken from wages is so much gained, but a greater error was never made. It would not be difficult to prove that, with very few exceptions, the employers paying the best wages are also doing the most work, and commanding the highest price for their work. Likewise, the employer who always contrives to pay a few shillings per week above what others are paying in wages will always have the pick of the labour market, and hence his work will always surpass his rivals. It would be easy to bring forward many instances of houses of business which owe their supremacy and affluence to the generous treatment of employ  es; and others, where this policy having been withdrawn, the business has declined with the leaving of old assistants. Few employers seem to think that their commercial success depends largely on their assistants; but such cannot be denied by anyone who examines with any closeness the rise and fall of commercial houses.

**Low Wages.**—An over-stocked labour market, severe competition amongst employers, and cutting prices will generally end in low wages. The average employer is far too short-sighted to see that it is in the interest of both himself and his employ   e that wages should be kept up, and those who follow an occupation should be kept down in numbers. Once employers begin to cut down their prices it is only a question of a shorter or longer time and wages will follow. This fall will continue until wages sink so low that the worker does not obtain enough to subsist upon; next, the employer will find that it does not pay to produce the article; and finally, the employers are driven by the low prices current to take action, and to decide by some mutual arrangement upon a fixed rate at which they calculate it will yield a profit to produce photographs. Such a course has already been taken in trades where employers have commenced the absurd policy of cutting prices.

**A Minimum Wage.**—Before these events can happen they may be avoided if only the assistants would organise, and fix a minimum wage below which they would not work. This action, by keeping up wages, would compel employers to maintain their prices and not to work at sweating rates. Low prices have already done much harm to photographic assistants, and nothing but



starvation wages could be expected from firms who are ready to supply a dozen Cabinets for 5/-, a dozen Cartes for 2/6, and a dozen Midgets for 1/-. Prices like these are ruinous to the whole trade. They must drive wages down to the lowest level, the assistant must be sweated, bullied, and ill-treated to make these prices pay for the cost of production, and then give a profit. A firm of this description will pay an operator 25/- per week; re-toucher £1; printer 15/- to 18/-; and a spotter from 8/- to 10/-. Considering the time given in becoming proficient in these operations, wages on this scale are about the lowest possible. They are nearer the price paid to an unskilled labourer; and taking into account the appearance and education demanded from photographic assistants can be best described as subjection of the assistant to a process of slow starvation.

**The Wages of Women.**—Women suffer most from these low wages, for it is not possible to support life in any degree of comfort upon 8/- to 10/- a week, yet some spotters have to face this hardship. There is no reason why women should not receive the same wages as men when engaged upon the same work. Some firms are able to pay spotters 20/- or 30/- per week. Why not all firms? If such wages can be paid to women as spotters their services must be equally valuable in re-touching and other branches, and should be paid accordingly. Yet they are not so paid; the fact of their being women is made an excuse for paying lower wages, and is not the result of want of skill. The low wages paid to women is then used as a means of forcing down the wages of men, and is a proceeding that should be resisted by both men and women engaged in photography.

From the foregoing considerations I contend that the overstocked state of the photographic labour market is directly responsible for the low wages of good workers. The inefficient, half-trained, and incompetent, by competing with the best workers, cause wages to fall. Employers take advantage of this surplus labour, using it as a means of reducing wages. They also compete one against the other in cutting prices, and again reduce wages. The assistant, has, therefore, first, to keep out the intruders; secondly, to strive to keep up wages by combining against employers; thirdly, to acquire the skill and make himself worth the wages he demands.

Competition and wages, the one depending on the other, are the two principal questions to be kept constantly in view. But there are, in addition, many minor grievances to be remedied, reforms needed, and evils to be redressed. These I will briefly enumerate under the headings of Legal, Trade, and Provident.

**Legal.—Servant or Workman.**—A photographic assistant is not regarded as a workman in the ordinary sense; in all disputes arising about wages, wrongful dismissal, or breach of con-



tract, he has not the advantage of bringing his case before a police magistrate for immediate decision, but must proceed by the cumbrous and more expensive method of the County Court. In many cases this acts as a check, and instances of gross injustice are allowed to pass without any action being taken. The workman thus occupies a better position before the law than the servant, and, as a matter-of-fact the servant has no rights apart from his master. Nearly all recent legislation in favour of workmen disregards the servant, and consequently the photographic assistant. The servant has some privileges denied the workman; he cannot be so readily dismissed, and may claim a week or month's notice. On the whole, however, it is far better to be classed as a workman, for it is more suited to the freedom of the times, and it enables the worker to take his full share in the labour questions of the day.

**Fines.**—Fines are constantly imposed upon assistants that are unjust and illegal. For example, at the works of a well-known firm it is usual to lock the gate precisely at eight in the morning; all who are outside lose half-a-day's pay, not being allowed in till one o'clock. The firm pay girls 10/- a week, and a fine of 10d. for so trivial an offence as being a few minutes late is not only excessive, but a serious reduction in so low a wage. The work must still be done, and it is plain that these deductions are a clear gain to the firm. Other employers will stop money from wages for work spoiled, and I have known 2/- thus paid, 1/- of which was a clear profit to the employer. Another kind of fine is disclosed in the following passage, taken from a letter in the *British Journal of Photography*.

“At one studio where I was re-touching, a parcel was delivered, addressed to the head of the firm, with £1 to pay. The money was paid, and when the head arrived and opened the parcel it was found to contain a brick. The operator, a ‘mere lad,’ was bullied, and told he would have to refund the £1, which he did.”

The exaction should have been resisted, for it is not legal to deduct money from the wages due to a servant. All fines, not agreed upon at the time of engagement, cannot be enforced, for employers must now exhibit in a prominent place a list of their fines. The whole question of fines has recently engaged the attention of Parliament under the Truck Acts, and owing to the energetic action of the National Union of Shop Assistants, the fining system has received a severe blow. In future, it will not be possible to impose fines which are arbitrary, unjust, and tyrannical, and photographic assistants should guard themselves against any such exactions.

**Detaining Specimens.**—A long-standing grievance amongst assistants, especially operators, it is surprising, considering the almost weekly complaints that no proceedings have yet been taken against the offenders. I cannot recall a case, and should be



very glad to hear of one. A more cruel and heartless swindle could not be devised, for with the loss of his specimens goes every chance of an operator obtaining a situation. To take a man's specimens is to leave him stranded and helpless. Employers are by no means ready to supply specimens to every operator, and they are, therefore, difficult to replace. It would be of great service to operators if some scheme could be started by which they could supply themselves with specimens of their work; either by the use of a studio and apparatus, or by paying a certain sum to their employers for a supply. A fund might be started to defray the cost of recovering specimens. It need hardly be added that any scheme of regaining wrongfully detained specimens would be greatly aided if assistants were organised; for its members in any part of the country could make personal application. To warn assistants against a peculiar form of this swindle I will give an extract from the letter of a victim:—

“I answered an advertisement, and sent a dozen of my best specimens, with testimonials, etc. Only a Post-office address was given in the advertisement, and I know I was foolish to depart from my usual custom of waiting for the firm's address before forwarding specimens. I have written two polite requests, and sent stamps for the return of my property, and I have since sent a letter threatening the party with the terrors of the law; but all to no purpose. What more can I do but warn others seeking employment to risk nothing of value until they have a business address.”

A writer in the *British Journal of Photography* commented upon the case, remarking:—“To me it offers one of the saddest of photographic episodes that brought before the readers of this journal last week by ‘Operator.’ He has admittedly behaved like a fool in sending his specimens to an unknown destination, so-and-so, at a post-office, but that does not lessen the turpitude of the receiver. How many an unfortunate operator's chief means of obtaining a livelihood lie in the power to show specimens of his work! What baseness of mind must be the characteristic of these advertising ‘employers.’ Even if we allow that often it is the advertiser's own fault in not placing identifying marks on his photographs, and not sending stamps for their return, there yet remains a substratum of swindlers whom to discover and bring to condign punishment would be a most worthy aim of any Photographic Union.”

**Wrongful Dismissal.**—Many cases come up in which the assistant is dismissed under circumstances that would not stand the test of the Law Courts. The most common is dismissal without the usual week's notice, either for some misconduct which does not justify such dismissal, or to suit the convenience of the employer. The photographic assistant cannot be discharged so easily, and is entitled to a full week's notice or a money equivalent. Another practice that is spreading is the discharge at a day's notice. Now,



if the assistant is classed as a servant such action is not legal ; but if a workman the practice would be legal. While, then, the worker in photography is a servant, he should take care to preserve those rights he is entitled to, and not to accept the day or minute's notice which an employer chooses to give.

**Breaches of Contract.**—Many employers seem to think that their assistants have no legal status, and can therefore be treated in an arbitrary fashion. A few test cases would soon remove this misconception, and bring about a recognition of the legal rights of the assistants. Here is a case in which the master was taught a lesson. A re-toucher was engaged by a firm at a salary of 30/-, with the promise of a rise if his work improved. After working for a month he was told that his work was then satisfactory, and that henceforward his salary was to be 35/-. For the following two weeks no sign of the promised rise was seen, and not until the third week. The retoucher then reminded his employer that the two previous week's rise was still unpaid, he was politely told that if he was not satisfied to go to —; the employer ending by giving the retoucher a week's notice. He left at once, and, being a man of spirit, summoned the employer for the 10/- unpaid, and was allowed the full amount.

A case of a different kind was reported in the papers recently. In this instance an operator was engaged for three years. The employer was well acquainted with the operator's work, he having been engaged in a branch studio. After several months he was dismissed on a charge of incompetency. The operator urged breach of contract, and claimed damages. His employer could not sustain his charge and lost the case, the operator receiving substantial damages. These cases should impress upon assistants the duty of urging their just claims, not simply for their own benefit but for the benefit of all in the trade.

**Employers' Liability.**—Employers' liability is the name applied to an Act of Parliament that enables workmen to claim compensation for injuries received through the negligence of their employers or their servants. Accidents are fortunately not very prevalent in photography, although, in future, with the increasing use of machinery, they may become much more common. Hence it would be well to know in what position the photographic worker stands in respect to this Act. Whether not being a workman places him outside the scope of the Act. A few test cases would quickly settle the matter. In general, the Act gives:—"The same right of compensation and remedies against the employer as if the workman had not been a workman of, nor in the service of, the employer, nor engaged in his work." Formerly a workman injured by the negligence of a fellow workman had no such redress.



**Factory and Workshop Acts.**—These Acts do not apply to men, but they have large powers of dealing with women and children. The Acts attempt to regulate the whole working conditions of women and children, being most comprehensive. They deal with sanitary provision, health, safety against fire, forbid Sunday work, regulate times of employment, hours for meals, holidays, and overtime. They apply to a large number of photographic establishments, and every woman worker should make it her duty to see that the provisions of the Acts are carried out. A letter to the Factory Inspector, London, S.W., will receive immediate attention. All communications are regarded as strictly confidential. On the visit of the factory inspector the employer, or his manager, must withdraw from the room to allow of any complaints being freely made without fear of after proceedings against those who give information. The most wide departure from these Acts are made by photographers, mostly in regard to the air space demanded for each person. The Act states 250 cubic feet for each person as a minimum, and 400 when working overtime. A correspondent gave me the following particulars of a workroom for retouchers: It was 12 feet long, 3 feet wide; and seven persons were at work in this den. My informant adds:—

“The heat was unbearable, and I could not keep from sleeping at the work, the air was so oppressive; it was awful to stand. The poor girls! I was sorry for them. They are nearly like serfs: afraid to speak.”

In this room, supposing it to be 10 feet high, there was a space of 360 cubic feet, or about 50 cubic feet to each person, being 200 below the minimum demanded by the provisions of the Factory Acts.

Retouchers and operators suffer much ill-health as a consequence of close confinement and bad ventilation, some employers thinking that any hole or corner is good enough for a retoucher to work in. I have seen a retoucher put in a cupboard 3 feet square and 6 feet high, the only means of ventilation being a small opening 6 inches square. His employer was greatly surprised when he stayed away ill, and stated the cause as the foul air of the cupboard.

The above details touch briefly the chief grievances of assistants which can be met by legal action. It will be noticed that to employ some of these means the photographic assistant must be classed as a workman. To some this will appear like losing caste, the photographer being supposed to have some affinity to the professions. This may be so, but I am convinced that if solid advantage is to be gained, rather than the mere empty title to respectability, it will only be from becoming workmen, and using all the means established for their benefit and protection.



**Trade.**—I shall now consider those grievances and desired improvements which cannot be dealt with by legal action, but must depend for their removal on the enlightenment and generosity of employers.

**Boarding-in System.**—The practice of boarding and lodging an assistant in part payment of wages is very common in photography; it is decidedly against the interests of the assistant. In this particular the workman is protected by the Truck Acts, his independence is secure; deductions, or payment in kind, being illegal. The boarding-in system is opposed to the spirit of our time, being a survival of chattel slavery; it entirely destroys the independence of any body of workers, and deprives them of liberty of action in taking part in any movement for bettering their lot. It likewise means a money loss to an assistant, because it allows the employer to gain any profit which comes from a cheapening of food. Food is now very cheap, and it is plain that the assistant who accepts food in part payment of wages loses the benefit of the cheapness. Every worker should receive the full amount of his wages, and never submit to a reduction from any cause. Money is now a great power as a fighting force, and a worker should not leave his hold of this power which money gives, for he can defend himself and protect others by its aid. It is unwise to pass it over or leave it in the hands of another, because it can be used against the giver. This is done in the boarding-in system, and, as a result, a more helpless body of workers cannot be found. They have no power of any kind amongst them, and are at the mercy of their employers.

**Sunday Work.**—Sunday work should be abolished as unnecessary, vexacious, and entirely opposed to the best interests of both master and man. It is also unhealthy, an occasional rest being much needed when we consider the sedentary and confined character of studio work and retouching. There exists no good reason why the photographic assistant should work on Sunday.

**Weekly Half-Holiday.**—This is most welcome to any worker, and no employer has yet found cause to regret or suffered any loss from the concession. Over and over again it has been demonstrated that tired labour is dear, and that a reduction of the hours of labour, within certain limits, does not of necessity mean a corresponding diminution of output; whilst, on the other hand, it is daily proved that when carried on beyond a reasonable time work becomes both dear and unprofitable. As a rule, retouchers work far too many hours, and it would be difficult to find one, who after some years of work, has not suffered some injury to the sight. I believe that in nearly every case it is only a matter of time when the sight is entirely ruined, and the retoucher is unable to follow his occupation. A little thought on the part of employers would help to put off this evil day.



**Long Hours, Overtime, Meal Times.**—All of these have considerable effect upon the health of assistants, and depend largely upon the employer for their proper working. Where possible, meal times should be definitely fixed and adhered to. In the case of operators this is often a difficulty, but is not beyond solution. In many studios the operators are bound to take their meals as the chance offers, and this is often three or four hours after the proper time. A delay of this length must be harmful, must prevent a man from doing his best work; and no right-thinking employer would permit an operator to suffer the inconvenience if it could be possibly avoided.

The regulation of hours is urgently needed; some mutual arrangement should be arrived at to do away with the present haphazard system. The rule of working late when it is fine, and leaving early when the light is bad works out to the decided disadvantage of the assistant, the fine being much in excess of the dull days. It would be fairer to have fixed hours of working throughout the year, and a scale of pay for overtime. Neither side could then complain; there would be no cause of ill-feeling with respect to the length of day an assistant is to work. To say a man is to work so long as there is work to be done is an unbusinesslike and unsatisfactory arrangement. It is open to any construction, and means in practice that an assistant is never done work.

**Season Work.**—Closely connected with the subject of hours, is that of season places. An employer will engage an assistant, promising him a permanency, thus inducing him to accept the lowest wage. At the end of the season some trivial excuse will be made, and the assistant discharged. A fair employer would not stoop to this meanness for the gain of a few shillings a week, but would willingly pay a higher wage for a temporary engagement. Much hardship is endured by assistants through accepting situations represented as permanent, which are only season jobs; and it would be an improvement if a scale of wages for permanent and season places could be arranged. A short engagement ought to be paid for at a higher rate than a permanent one, and employers should deal fairly with assistants on this matter, and state the nature of their vacancy.

**Railway Fares.**—Railway fares ought always to be paid by an employer; this is recognised by all fair employers, and it is the general custom to pay the fare if unsuitable at the end of a month. Others, however, will cause an assistant to travel from one end of the country to the other; dismiss him at a week's notice, and refuse to pay a single farthing towards travelling expenses. I have a complaint from a married man who removed from England to Ireland with his wife and family to a situation. After being in his



place a few weeks, and giving satisfaction, he was told that he must either take a reduction in wages or leave. The man was indignant at such treatment, and sooner than submit to a reduction he left; was stranded in Ireland, without the money to return, and forced to wait until he received money from his friends in England. The same tactics are pursued by this employer in the case of every new assistant; in most cases he attains his object. It would not be so easy if an assistant could demand his railway fare, for it is the loss of this sum which the assistant cannot afford. To an employer the amount of a railway fare is a relatively small item, whilst to an assistant it often means a week's salary. It sometimes happens that an employer misses the opportunity of securing the man most suitable to his requirements, who is not able to come because his railway fare is not assured.

**Trivial Offences.**—It is astonishing how constantly some firms change their employées. For example, a printer in a well-known establishment, during the 18 months he was there, saw 100 fresh assistants. The firm employ about 30: and thus, in 18 months, there were three complete changes. This printer held the record for long service. Now all the assistants are discharged for the most trivial acts. The chief is the possessor of a bald head, which he carefully conceals by wearing a skull cap. One morning a printer arrived at business before the proper time, and saw the chief without his cap. At the end of the week the printer was told his services were no longer required. Another assistant entered a barber's shop, found his employer capless, and was discharged. Anyone, who accidentally discovers the chief's baldness, receives notice to leave. Bad work or incompetency is seldom the cause of dismissal. As might be expected this constant change throws all in disorder; work is sometimes six months behind. Not long since a lady returned the proofs of her child's portrait, remarking:—"Baby has grown so much since the picture was taken that they are of no use now." A business cannot prosper for long when conducted on these principles. At another studio the assistant operator was dismissed under the following circumstances: His employer was attempting to photograph a difficult baby; toys, cat-calls, shouting, whistling, all the usual tricks had been tried and failed. The employer, turning to his assistant, said:—"Now, Jones, go outside, open the door quick, and run in on your hands and knees, barking like a dog." Jones failed to see any photography in such antics, and politely refused. For this refusal he was told that he might leave in a week, because "he took no interest in the business." I could give many other examples of loss of situation for the most trifling offences, but the above will suffice. They show that employers will discharge an assistant for anything or nothing, and that trivial offences are looked upon as vital. However good a worker a man may be he cannot protect himself against this form of injustice,



and must submit ; but when this kind of employer has the audacity to assert that photographic assistants are a careless, slovenly, inefficient body of men, it is time for some kind of protest to be raised. The employers above cited have had men in their employ who have done the highest class of work, and could do it again for any man if properly treated. Why, then, should these men lose a good character because a certain class of employer chooses to behave in a vindictive and spiteful spirit ?

**Bullying, Sweating.**—These are the outcome of weakness. Assistants have to put up with them because employers are well aware of their helplessness and lack of organisation. People do not attempt to bully a strong man, for strong men are apt to retaliate more forcibly than politely. In like manner, in so far as assistants increase their independence, bullying and sweating will become less.

**Term of Apprenticeship.**—I pointed out above the want of a better system of apprenticeship, and I think the only remedy is to fix a term of years for all who wish to enter the trade.

**Board of Arbitration.**—That is a body of photographers who would meet to settle all questions in dispute between employers and employées. Both masters and men would be represented, and they would regulate the various relations with justice to each side.

**Provident.—Unemployed.**—Few who have not experienced it can realise the terrible condition of the honest worker who is penniless, is anxious to work, and yet unable to obtain any. A more heartbreaking and dispiriting state cannot well be imagined. That men in this state should be driven to suicide is not surprising to those who know what it means to be out of work. To them it is rather a matter of surprise that so many have the courage to fight against the spectre of suicide, and the slow starvation which war against the man out of employment. All who have any acquaintance with a want of employment should welcome any scheme which will enable the worker to look forward to such times with a sense of security. Photographers suffer considerable loss from this cause, as all who have been in the trade for any length of time must know. Whether they suffer more than other workers I cannot say, but I should think the percentage of unemployed is above the average. What assistants want is some means of meeting times of unemployment without fear of starvation, debt, and the necessity of parting with property at a great loss. This provision



should not depend on the benevolence of another, a very uncertain source, but should be raised by assistants in times of prosperity, and when wanted demanded as a right. Charity is degrading, and has been so much abused in recent years, that the honest worker should provide for his own needs.

**Sick.**—After want of employment, sickness is the greatest evil amongst the workers; it may overtake the strongest, and it is well to be prepared. The Friendly Societies have done much in this direction, but my own opinion is that it would be much better for the workers of each trade to provide amongst themselves. The cost of a sick benefit is not much, and could readily be subscribed apart from any dependence on the benevolent.

**Accidents.**—Accidents resulting in bodily injury often happen to those engaged in trade, and although photography is not a dangerous trade, nor the workers liable to injury, it would yet be well to have a fund to meet cases of emergency.

**Benevolent.**—In every occupation are persons who fail to provide against times of misfortune, and other unlucky ones who suffer all the calamities that can befall mortal man. In such instances it is sometimes productive of good to supply the unfortunate with a suit of clothes, tools, a railway fare, or to advance a loan. Many a man can be saved by such a trifle from sinking into poverty and degradation, perhaps from crime; and it is the duty of all to protect their fellows from so miserable a fate.

**Situation Register.**—It would be a great boon to assistants if they could obtain situations without using the tedious process of advertising in the trade journals. A register could easily be kept in some central position where employers and those seeking employment could record their names. The week's delay now endured would be avoided, and the expenses of advertising saved at a time when most wanted.

**Trade Paper.**—Assistants require some medium for the expression of their opinions, and to record matters of interest relating to the trade. The ordinary journals give very little attention to the assistants, beyond taking his advertisement when out of a place. A paper also forms a bond of union between its readers, helping to bring them into contact and association. It can also publish cases of ill-treatment by powerful employers without fear of retaliation.

Having now reviewed the grievances and desired improvements, it remains to seek for the remedy of the first and the way of attaining the second. These are very plentiful. Every man who thinks at all carries about his own pet scheme, which fits neatly in the waistcoat pocket, and with a little wind and talking can be blown out to a life-size Utopia or some equal state of blessedness. Some swear by Socialism, others by Individualism, and so on without end. I shall not attempt to examine these numerous schemes, nor thread my way through this cloudy maze of the ideal, but shall cling to a couple of slender lines that run like two steel wires through a mass of tangled spider webs. These two wires are solid and strong, and, in fact, support the bulk of fine-spun theories which surround and hide them. The one is Co-operation and the other Trade Unionism. Of all the plans put forward to improve the condition of the workers, these alone can show any real work done. They alone descend from the abstract to the concrete. Co-operation seeks to remove the cause of industrial evils, while Trade Unionism attempts to lessen the evils produced. I will proceed to discuss in brief the principles of each as applied to photography and the condition of photographic assistants.

**“British Journal of Photography,” June 5th, 1896 :—Co-operation.**—Co-operation may be described generally as industry carried on by the workers for the workers, the chief aim being the welfare of those engaged rather than the creation of a profit. What profit is made goes either to the workers, or to the extension of direct employment. Under such a system an employer is unknown, his duties being performed by those working in the undertaking. Co-operation is an advance upon the factory system, which, as I stated above, is becoming common in photography. The factory system, although having great advantages over cottage industry as a method of production, involves many evils ; it reduces the workman to a machine, destroys individual initiative, and takes from a workman all intelligent interest in his work. To remove these evils, and at the same time to secure the best features of the system in production, the principle of co-operation was formulated. Many so-called co-operative societies are merely so in name ; they endeavour to pay large dividends, and in so doing become limited liability companies. There are, however, many flourishing societies in which the true principles of co-operation are faithfully followed. The majority of co-operative societies are simply distributive, and not productive. A little consideration will show that to be successful in co-operative production is much more difficult than in co-operative distribution. A study of the question has led me to the conclusion that co-operative principles could be applied to Photography, and would increase the prosperity of the assistants. At present only one co-operative photographic studio is working, and is at Maidstone. It was started by a lady, and is worked almost entirely by



women workers. This solitary instance is remarkable, for few trades appear so peculiarly adapted to co-operative systems of production. Photography would come under co-operative production, the more difficult case, but this need cause no discouragement. Many attempts at co-operation have failed through bad work and mismanagement. In Photography both of these could be speedily dealt with before much harm was done. Bad work is quickly discovered, and bad management soon brings confusion. This is due to the well-organised condition of Photography; it is a process which, when once started, must be carried to completion. The highly-developed nature of the photographic technique also reduces management, in the ordinary commercial sense, to a minimum. Thus we often see the head of a business occupying a large part of his time in operating, in addition to fulfilling the duties of a manager. In general trade this would not be possible, the duties of management engrossing the whole attention of the principal. A photographer is, therefore, able to combine the two functions of workman and manager, without detriment to either. The duties of management in a co-operative studio could be still further reduced by each branch doing their own, and in this way a non-producing manager be dispensed with. The second source of failure—bad work—is readily corrected, for in past work there is constantly before the co-operators a standard to which present work can be compared. Practically, it is an easy matter to keep up the quality of the work; the check of one worker upon another is also very effective, an operator detecting bad prints from his negatives, and the printer soon complaining if negatives are faulty. By experience it will be found that no more exacting critic of a photographer than a fellow-workman is possible.

From bad work and mismanagement I foresee no source of failure to any scheme of co-operative Photography, if carried on by qualified workmen.

The economy from the financial side must be considerable. The trouble in all photographic ventures is the initial outlay for apparatus, stock, and accessories; which once met, it will be some years before so large a sum of money is again required. Furthermore, the scope of a business is much curtailed if the appliances are not ample. Many a photographic assistant will start a business with an outlay of about £100, only to find that his operations are so limited that it is a severe struggle to obtain a livelihood. One set of apparatus is practically of little use.

Supposing, however, an operator, re-toucher, and printer combine their forces and co-operate on equal terms, having a capital of from £300 or £400; with this sum they could begin with an extensive set of appliances, able to do all kinds of work that came to them. Their chief remaining expenses would be for material and wages. On both they would economise. Wages are much the heaviest item of expenditure in a photographic business; now our

co-operators would have every inducement to put their best work into the Society. Having a direct interest in the venture they would work hard for its success, and even if each received 10/- above the average wage the services rendered would still be underpaid. Slave labour has been proved to be the dearest of any, and we may be sure that its direct opposite, co-operative labour, would be correspondingly cheap. Hence wages would be economised.

Two other items of expenditure would be kept low—waste of time and waste of material. Waste of material is an important consideration in any photographic business that desires a reputation for good work; material must be wasted, but without doubt it would be the least possible among co-operative workers. Waste of time and daylight must also be avoided; in no business is this so important as in Photography, and I can conceive of no better preventative of these than making the workers the owners of their own industry. Taken throughout, photographic assistants are exceedingly conscientious in the matter of wasting time and materials; but at the same time it cannot be doubted that, whilst average human nature remains as it is, a man will be more careful of things which are his own than of things which belong to other people.

From this brief account of Co-operation, it may be gathered that its aim is to remove the grievances under which the workers suffer by entirely removing the causes, and establishing a new system of industrial production. Under this system the worker would be master of his own fate, and have the direction of his daily life in his own hands. The change must of necessity be slow; but once accomplished the present wrongs of the workers would disappear.

**Trade Unionism.**—Trade Unionism is not so ambitious as Co-operation; it does not aim at a complete readjustment of the relations of society, but to secure the best terms for the workers from their employers. These it endeavours to gain by the organisation of the workers, and by united action to persuade, and at times compel, the employing classes to accede what the workers consider their just demands. In effect it is a kind of warfare between employer and employée on the moral rather than the physical side; at times, however, physical force is prominent, and in a strike all the elements of actual warfare are present.

The aggressive side of trade unionism is of necessity the most pronounced, and gains an undue importance in consequence; in reality, it is only a small part of the many functions that a trade union performs. A well-organised union will attend to every phase of a worker's life which has any connection with business, in a less degree to his social life, and in no way to the religious life.



To give some idea of the scope of trade unionism, I append two tables of the annual expenditure of various unions and the objects upon which it was spent—

TABLE I.				TABLE II.			
		£	s. d.			£	s. d.
1. Unemployed ..	..	0	3 11	1. Unemployed ..	..	0 14	4
2. Dispute..	..	0	3 7	2. Dispute..	..	0 1	6
3. Sick ..	..	0	3 9	3. Sick ..	..	0 1	5
4. Accident ..	..	0	0 4	4. Accident ..	..	0 0	1
5. Superannuation..	..	0	1 9	5. Superannuation..	..	0 2	6
6. Funeral..	..	0	1 5	6. Funeral..	..	0 2	6
7. Other benefits ..	..	0	0 11	7. Other Benefits..	..	0 1	7
8. Working Expenses ..	..	0	5 8	8. Working Expenses ..	..	0 5	8
Total ..	..	<u>£1</u>	<u>1 4</u>	Total ..	..	<u>£1</u>	<u>9 7</u>

Table I. is the average annual expenditure per head of membership of a large number of unions drawn from the leading industries of the country.

Table II. The expenditure of the Paper and Printing Trades on the same basis. These trades are allied to photography; and Table II. best represents what would be the expenses of a Photographic Union. The following outline of a union for photographic assistants is based on Table II.

### PHOTOGRAPHIC ASSISTANTS' UNION.

All sections of photographic workers, both men and women, will be admitted, viz.: operator, retoucher, artist, enlarger, printer, receptionist, mounter, spotter, process worker, and photographic dealer's assistant.

#### OBJECTS.

(1.) To provide against want of employment, sickness, and accidents.

(2.) To provide legal protection against wrongful dismissal, detainers of specimens, breach of contract, illegal fines.

(3.) Trade protection, *i.e.*, to maintain a minimum wage, shorten excessive hours, advocate a weekly half-holiday, abolish the boarding-in system and Sunday work, to establish a situation register.

Entrance Fee 2/6; Subscription 6d. per week.

After six months' payment all out of work and sick to receive 10/- per week.

No benefit for more than ten weeks, nor to exceed £5 per annum, unless funds permit. Applicants must give some proof that they are qualified workers, stating in what branch employed,



the length of their service, the average wage received, and other information in their possession regarding hours, overtime, piece-work, etc. All information regarded as strictly confidential.

The above outline has been carefully drawn up, and states the most practical economic basis for the successful working of a Photographic Union. From these details it may be gathered that the yearly payment per member is £1 6/-. By Table II., 14/4 of this sum would be spent in unemployed benefit, 5/8 in working expenses; by Table I. 3/9 in sick benefit, leaving 2/3 for other benefits or to go towards forming a reserve fund. This arrangement would allow of 17 per cent. of the members receiving unemployed benefit and 9 per cent. sick benefit, giving a total of 26 per cent.—a very high proportion. In established unions the figures vary from 7 to 34 per cent. unemployed, and from 3 to 14 per cent. sick per annum. Allowing £3 as the average amount of benefit paid to sick and unemployed members, the expenditure would be £78 per 100 members, leaving a safe margin for working expenses and other minor benefits. This estimate is only provisional. Actual experiment must decide what is the correct percentage of sick and unemployed photographers; if it is high—which I am afraid it is—then the larger portion of the funds would be wanted to meet this benefit. Should it be found to be low, and a large surplus result, several courses could be followed. Firstly, the weekly subscription could be reduced to 4d. or 5d.; secondly, the benefits could be greatly increased beyond 10/- per week for ten weeks per annum; thirdly, other benefits could be added; fourthly, the surplus could be used in propaganda, or in taking up an aggressive attitude to increase wages and remove abuses.

Many assistants would prefer to join some form of friendly society rather than a trade union on the above lines, and when a trade union for photographic assistants was first proposed this preference was brought forward. In my opinion, the strongest friendly society is much inferior to the weakest trade union. A friendly society is an unorganised mass of different workers, having little in common and exercising not the slightest influence over its members. The society takes from the workers the threepence or fourpence per week, and the majority receive nothing in return, either in benefit or improved condition. Of what utility is it for a man to provide against a time of sickness which may never come, whilst in so doing he is losing ninepence or a shilling from his weekly wage? Workers want the fullest money value for their labour, and nothing else will benefit them. The friendly societies take from the workers an enormous sum yearly, and for which they receive no equivalent, either in wages or material improvement. Trade unionism, then, is the only means of really benefitting the workers; if it does not offer so much money benefit as some other societies this is compensated for by the general improved condition and increase in wages. Some trade unions, however, fall into the same error as the



friendly societies when they accumulate large sums of money. Such money should rightly be applied either to co-operative production or to advance the economic independence of the worker.

### **Trade Unionism & Photographic Assistants.**

--My conclusion is that a trade union is the only practical way of obtaining immediate relief for the oppression and wrongs under which any body of workers may suffer, and the photographic assistant is no exception to this rule. Several have recognised this, and made unsuccessful attempts to start a union; the difficulties to be overcome discouraging the stoutest. The first of these is the wide distribution of photographic assistants, and the consequent expense of organisation. The second, the want of knowledge of the advantages of trade unionism amongst assistants. Thirdly, the working expenses would always be large on account of the comparatively small number of eligible members, and the smallness of the branches. This would keep the union poor and cripple its action.

With these drawbacks before us, it remains to consider whether the photographic assistant could not find some organisation that would admit him as a member and is working along similar lines. Both these conditions are fulfilled by the National Union of Shop Assistants, Warehousemen, and Clerks. The Union is willing to admit photographic assistants on terms of equality with its other members, and its objects are identical with those outlined in this pamphlet. To join the N.U.S.A. appears to me the most practical policy to adopt under the circumstances. The Union promises to become one of the largest and most powerful in the country; it has already overcome the initial expenses connected with the formation of a trade union, has branches in every part, and is making its influence felt in Parliament, the capitalist press, and amongst employers. The photographic assistants, by joining this society, would acquire a position and a strength which they could not possibly have if standing alone.

As the outcome of a recent correspondence in the columns of the *British Journal of Photography* on "Assistants and their Grievances," a number of assistants have joined the National Union of Shop Assistants; what is now wanted is every photographic assistant to follow this good example, and thus make some organised attempt to redress their grievances.

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NOTE.—Particulars of the National Union of Shop Assistants may be obtained from the General Secretary, Mr. J. MACPHERSON. 55 & 56, CHANCERY LANE, LONDON, W.C.